

Every day, Americans are experiencing the realities of global climate change.

Autumn hardly seems to have arrived in much of the country. In the Northern Hemisphere, September 2012 tied with 2009 as the second-warmest on record. Globally, September 2012 tied with 2005 as the warmest in the 133-year history of record keeping.

In the first six months of 2012, we saw more than 22,000 daily high temperature records tied or broken and the largest drought declaration in more than 50 years, encompassing more than two-thirds of the continental United States.

A new survey released by the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University indicates that a growing number of Americans are accepting the reality of climate change. More people are expressing concern about how climate change affects them, their loved ones and the world at large.

The report, “Climate Change in the American Mind — Americans’ Global Warming Beliefs and Attitudes in September 2012,” saw a notable shift in Americans’ beliefs since this spring, when similar polling was published.

Key findings from the report indicate that 70 percent of Americans believe that global warming is real, while the number who say it is not happening has declined to just 12 percent.

More than half of Americans, 54 percent, now believe global warming is a result of human activities, an increase from 46 percent in March 2012. This marks the first time since 2008 that the figure has been above 50 percent, an encouraging finding that suggests the disinformation campaign led by fossil fuel interests to deny climate science is failing in the face of the facts.

A growing number of Americans, now 57 percent, also understand that climate change threatens our national security, and they are already noticing the negative effects stemming from this threat.

The study finds that an increasing number of Americans, 40 percent, believe that climate change is currently negatively affecting people overseas, up from 32 percent in March; 36 percent of people believe that global warming is harming people here in the United States, an increase of 6 points in as many months.

Additionally, 42 percent of Americans identify global warming as a threat to themselves, an increase of 13 points.

The trend continues throughout the survey. There is increasing concern about how climate change will affect families and communities, with each group showing double-digit gains. More than half the respondents, 58 percent, say they are “somewhat” or “very worried” about global

warming, which is the highest level of concern since 2008.

It is the duty of policymakers to address the concerns of the American people and to explore what measures can be taken to effectively deal with what may very well be the most significant threat we face. We should look at this not just as a challenge but as an opportunity. Spending on new, innovative and more sustainable technologies, many of which are being developed today in Silicon Valley, will not only reduce carbon emissions but also create jobs in this country and allow us to stay competitive with the rest of the world.

Advancements in renewable-energy technologies such as less costly solar panels that deliver more electricity from the same amount of sunlight, and energy-efficient technologies such as electrochromic windows and smart electronic devices will help America deal not only with the reality of global climate change but also with the economic hardships we face.

This is our opportunity to move forward on many fronts, and judging by the numbers cited in the Center for Climate Change Communication's survey, the majority of Americans agree.